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Office of the Secretary

NEW CHALLENGES FOR SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Dec 14, 1967  
Md. Assoc. of Soil  
Conservation  
Cap. 2

On the morning of November 20 -- less than a month ago --

President Johnson took part in a small ceremony at the Commerce Department in Washington.

The occasion was clear and simple. At 11 a.m. that day the gigantic census clock in the Department lobby was to report that the U.S. population had reached the 200 million mark.

Actually, the census clock is admittedly running behind by possibly as much as several million. So the exact time we reached the 200 million mark is not known and relatively unimportant. The fact that we have reached a population of 200 million is important -- for its ramifications are, at the same time, exciting, frightening, challenging, and profound.

Consider this: It took this nation almost 350 years to reach a population of 100 million. That was in 1915. Now 52 years later, it's 200 million. In all probability we will exceed 300 million before the close of this century -- less than 32 years from now.

The rapid growth of our population, increasing at the rate of better than 3 million people each year, is not a comforting thought. But it is, nevertheless, one we cannot -- must not -- ignore.

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Remarks by Alfred L. Edwards, Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture, before the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts' Annual Conference, at the Center of Adult Education, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, December 14, 1967, 6:30 p.m.

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It's not just the number of people -- as alarming as that is -- more important, it's their distribution. Right now 70 percent of our population is crowded onto less than 2 percent of our land. If present trends continue, most of the 100 million to come in the next 25 years will be added to it. And all of America will suffer.

Just what are the prospects for those still unborn?

Will they be jammed into the crowded and cluttered urban centers? Live their lives in pockets of desperate rural poverty? Try to make do with what's left after forest and farmland are raped to make way for instant-blight commercial districts and monotonous residential sprawl, devoid of trees and open space? Is this their heritage? I think not.

The future shape of America depends upon what the people want it to become. And larger and larger numbers of people are acting and reacting today as never before in the history of this nation. Informed, articulate citizens are becoming concerned with not just the quantity but also the quality of their environment. They are paying closer attention to details never before thought necessary.

They are seeing, often for the first time, the interdependence of urban, suburban, and rural interests -- especially in the area of natural resources.

They are fed up with ugliness and blight, honky-tonk strips and neon jungles, stinking rivers and poisonous air.

They are fed up because they see only disaster in the wanton destruction of our natural environment.

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This deep concern is triggering a rebirth -- a resurgence -- in the role of local government -- in county commissions, in planning boards, health commissions, park and recreation groups, zoning boards and the like. They are becoming more and more involved in comprehensive planning and in the proper development of the area's land, water, and related resources.

It has become evident to many that in areas of rapid land-use change we have ceased to contribute to the quality of human life.

In our haste to implement every new technological advancement, we have ignored man's need for the gifts only nature can provide.

We use land extravagantly and wastefully. We have mutilated most of the open space around our cities. The green fields and stately trees, the solitude and spaciousness that lured man to the suburbs in the first place are often foreclosed to him shortly after he arrives.

Recreation facilities are vastly overcrowded or non-existent. Commuting becomes a brutal ordeal.

These signs, in varying degrees, can be seen throughout America. Hardly anywhere are they more evident and more decisive than here in Maryland where the trend to urbanization has caused a revolution in land use -- not only in the urban centers and in their immediate surroundings, but in the countryside that must serve the greater population more broadly and intensely than in the past.

Herein lies the challenge to Maryland's soil conservation districts and to you supervisors. If we are to reverse the trend of land misuse -- if we are, indeed, to create Communities of Tomorrow where the economic and cultural opportunities of urban life are blended with the

space and beauty of the countryside -- we must start by agreeing that comprehensive land-use planning is essential.

As we continue to enlarge the man-made portion of our environment, we must do it wisely and with forethought. And we must do it now.

The shape of Maryland's future is being fashioned today -- in the mushrooming suburban communities across the state, on the drawing boards of public and private planners and developers, in the "new towns" rising on the landscape, and right here during your association's annual conference.

You have in your grasp the tools and knowledge to make a lasting and important contribution to Maryland's future. And that future bristles with excitement and promise.

By the year 2000 we could step up to a higher plane of civilization where city slums and rural poverty are both things of the past; where a bountiful countryside supports not only a growing agriculture, but also new industry and towns; where lakes, rivers, and streams run clean to quench the thirst of a growing population; where outdoor recreational opportunities are within the grasp of all; and where the beauty of the land kindles the spirit of a dynamic people.

Underlying each goal, and basic to it, is natural resource conservation -- the development and wise use of the area's soil, water, forests, and related resources.

The conservation of our land is everyone's responsibility. It's not just the Federal Government's. It's not just the soil conservation district's. It's everyone's.

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Nevertheless, you soil conservation district supervisors are in a unique position. You have had more experience in dealing with resource problems than anyone else. Frankly, no one is in a better spot to understand the problems and to coordinate and direct local efforts in solving them.

It's no wonder that more and more responsible planning people, developers, contractors, engineers, organizations, and local governments are seeking guidance through the local conservation districts. You have much to offer.

The soil survey -- that scientific inventory of the land you have used so successfully in developing land for agriculture -- is being employed more and more by urban people to locate safe industrial and residential sites, to evaluate soil and ground conditions for highways, pipelines, and airports, to select sites for open spaces, recreation areas and lakes, and as the basis for health ordinances, zoning, and building codes.

Through the small watershed program you are making notable progress in developing land and water for multiple use, extending flood protection and sediment control to suburban as well as rural areas, and developing public water-based recreation opportunities.

Outstanding has been the Rock Creek Watershed project, the first urban project in the nation. Here conservation measures on the open land coupled with floodwater dams will measurably reduce the flood and sediment damages in one of the nation's most picturesque and historic streams. Two reservoirs, developed for recreation, will attract an estimated 960,000 visitors annually. Lake Needwood, opened to the public in July has already established itself as a haven to many throughout the Washington Metropolitan area.

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Since Maryland has no natural inland lakes, every available reservoir site must be developed for multiple use -- for recreation and municipal and industrial water supply in addition to flood protection.

In the Gilbert Run Watershed project the Charles County Park and Recreation Board has joined the soil conservation district as sponsors and will develop the Wheatly reservoir for swimming, boating, fishing, picnicking and camping. An estimated 77,000 visitors are expected annually.

The municipal water supply measure planned for the Little Youghiogheny watershed project will give the Appalachian town of Oakland the necessary water to attract much needed industry to the community.

In county after county throughout Maryland you district supervisors are devoting more and more time and energy to urban related resource problems. Right now accelerated land-use change is underway in seven Maryland counties. In Montgomery County 80 percent of the district's and the Soil Conservation Service technician's time is devoted to suburban conservation.

What was farmland last week, may be the site of a housing development this week.

The soil and water problems -- problems that might have been minor while the land was farmed -- are suddenly magnified greatly. Erosion rates shoot up five fold and more, sediment chokes reservoirs, streams and rivers, natural drainage patterns are disrupted, and flood damages become greater.



The loss of valuable land to erosion is more intolerable today than ever before. Yet, in this enlightened age, we have a far greater capacity for destruction than the natural resource despoilers of the 19th century ever dreamed possible.

For example, here in Maryland soil erosion on a square mile of land can increase from as little as 50 tons per year on farmland to more than 2,300 tons a year on land being converted to urban uses -- for subdivisions, apartments, highways, commercial and industrial buildings and public utilities.

And the damages don't stop with the eroded land. The soil washed away becomes silt -- one of this nation's major and most costly water pollutants. Silt fouls our water, reduces reservoir storage capacity, chokes harbors, streams, and lakes, ruins water based recreation areas, and destroys spawning beds for fish and shellfish.

Silt pollution damages in the United States run in excess of \$350 million a year -- most of which is preventable. The silt load deposited each year in the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers at Washington is estimated at  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million cubic yards. It costs as little as 3 to 5 cents a cubic yard to keep the soil on the land, but it costs \$1 or more a yard to dredge it out of the water once it's there.

We know -- you and I -- that conservation practices in the proper combination have been effective in reducing sediment production by 10 to 90 percent. Over the past 30 years, the Department of Agriculture in partnership with soil conservation districts has helped farmers and other land owners make better land-use decisions. During this we have learned much through

both research and practical experience in the use, management, and behavior of our soil and water resources. Many of the basic principles are applicable both directly and indirectly to the use and management of soil and water problems in areas of rapid growth and development. Fortunately, this is now being recognized in some areas.

This past June Montgomery County passed an ordinance requiring builders and developers to take steps to control soil erosion at construction sites.

The county planning board now conditions its approval of subdivision plans on the establishment of erosion and sediment control measures by the developer. These measures are specified by the board after receiving recommendations from the Montgomery Soil Conservation District.

Since July, when the ordinance went into effect, the district has made erosion control recommendations for 45 developers on areas ranging from one-half acre lots to 250 acre subdivisions.

This was the first enforceable ordinance of this nature passed in Maryland. I commend the county officials for taking this historic action. I commend the Montgomery County Soil Conservation District for supporting it and implementing it.

Soil conservation districts are doing a notable job throughout Maryland -- from the Appalachian highlands to the eastern shore. You district supervisors have undertaken new and challenging tasks -- but the most challenging still lie ahead.

The continued urbanization of Maryland is inevitable -- but why must it take place in overcrowded urban centers and at the expense of the rural areas?

We must now take a more rational approach to future urbanization and create in the countryside new communities that offer their own source of employment, that can be planned from the beginning to fill the aesthetic needs of the people, and that will offer far greater recreation opportunities.

We must look to the countryside. And in so doing we cannot -- we must not -- make the mistakes we are making today.

The Department of Agriculture is proud of its contributions to the soil conservation movement in this nation and its fruitful partnership with soil conservation districts. It now looks forward to greater accomplishments.

This year Secretary Freeman issued two landmark policy statements -- Resources in Action and Communities of Tomorrow. Both involve the total job of building the kind of environment and communities in which man can prosper, live fully, and survive.

The two documents outline the new conservation policies of USDA and point toward the solution to the imbalance of people and opportunity.

The soil conservation districts have an important role in bringing this about.

We are now standing on the threshold of a new era -- a rural awakening that could lead all America to a high plane of civilization. Only with continued dedication to the task of conserving our vital land and water resources can we obtain this goal. To this challenging and rewarding task the Department of Agriculture offers you its full cooperation.





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